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ABSTRACT

In order to improve instruction in basic speech courses, a program was developed adapting creative problem solving to speech preparation and to interactive speech communication. The program, called O-I-C--Orientation, Incubation, and Composition--and based on Howell's five levels of competence and their implications, begins with a thorough study of the various aspects of the anticipated communication event (orientation). The second stage of the program allows time for processing to occur (incubation). Finally, the third stage of the program consists of composition. The program emphasizes orality, based on the assumption that writing is a later developmental and cognitive process than speaking. (DF)

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O-I-C: AN ORALITY-BASED PROCEDURE FOR TEACHING INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE BASIC COURSE

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Faced with the task of improving students' communication skills, the basic course instructor makes tacit assumptions about relationships among the qualities of effective communication presented and discussed in class and ensuing positive changes in students' communication behavior. In other words, we answer the question of how students become better communicators; and the assumptions about learning that underlie our answers can be placed on a scale from behavioristic to mentalistic.

At one extreme, behavioristic assumptions ignore the learning mechanism or, rather, deny the significance of a mediating link between a cognitive grasp of what ought to be done and pursuant behavior. Speeches are graded, grades reward and punish thereby conditioning behavior, and that is that.

However, because the gap between described and demonstrated principles and performances that incorporate those principles is a large one, the student operating in this paradigm is encouraged to fill the gap by writing outlines, introductory paragraphs, and perhaps even entire manuscripts. In effect, the student retreats to the familiar territory of freshman composition class and the well-rehearsed steps of paper-writing. A successful speech student then is often the one who can best perform or deliver a presentation from written materials as though s/he was freely interacting with the audience.

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We are well-acquainted with the difficulty engendered by such performance: audience interaction is discouraged, frequently diminished, sometimes altogether precluded. And while there is bound to be a point of diminishing returns in audience size beyond which the advantages of spontaneous interaction are outweighed by formal expectations of performance, this is the least likely sort of situation for the occasional public speaker to encounter and thus the least useful for which to be prepared.

Thus we are tempted to regress, to hedge our bets with various degrees of extemporality, at least by discouraging use of prepared text in favor of idea outlines that eliminate the stiffness common in verbatim memorized delivery. Speaking from idea outlines, however, still inhibits audience interaction and diminishes the possibility of altering the course of a speech midstream no matter how obvious it is that things are going badly. Indeed, to whatever degree a message is fixed (i.e. written) in advance of its delivery, to that degree effective interaction between speaker and audience is prevented.

Like it or not, if we retreat from written preparation, we venture into the realm of mentalism, positing psychological constructs endowed with the power to effect behavioral change. We also forfeit the major opportunity teachers have to intervene in the preparation process since the outline submitted in advance is also a reliable way to monitor student progress in speech preparation.

In contrast to the public speaking emphasis, interpersonally oriented classrooms frequently operate on the largely mentalistic assumption that people in relationships can consciously examine the

dimensions of those relationships and constructively isolate parts that need further work. Instead of filling the precept-performance gap with written preparation, interpersonal communicators use each other's consciousness to facilitate the working through of relationship (that is, communication) difficulties. This approach is highly interactive, of course, but is useful only to the extent that both parties are willing and knowledgeable enough to enter into relationship discussion. Outside the classroom, both parties are seldom so sophisticated.

While mutually committed relationships occur more frequently than invitations to address large audiences (at least for most of us), the bulk of our practical communication is addressed no better by a mentalistic approach to interpersonal than by a behavioristic approach to public speaking.

One thing both approaches lack is a generalizeable link between the abstract knowledge of what effective communication looks, indeed sounds like, provided by classroom lecture and discussion, and out-of-the classroom practical performance. A theoretical framework explaining this link, and many of its mundane implications, are developed by William S. Howell in his book, The Empathic Communicator[1] As a text, this work is intended for interpersonal and small group classes. However, the theoretical framework, as Howell points out, is quite suited for the basic course. I propose first to review part of Howell's work as it frames the gap between conscious learning and practical behavior, and then to fill the gap with a pedagogical

process that adapts creative problem solving to speech preparation and to interactive speech communication. The process is called O-I-C, Orientation, Incubation, Composition.

Howell's Five Levels of Competence and their Implications

The relationship between knowledge about effective communication and effective performance is neatly framed in Howell's perspective by his five levels of communication competence.[2]

Level I, unconscious incompetence, is the lowest level of human communication behavior, characterized not only by ineffective performance but also by the erroneous belief that one's communicative failures are actually successes. While those around the unconscious incompetent are all too aware of his or her blundering, the level I person does not recognize that anything is wrong, least of all with his or her own communication.

Level II, conscious incompetence, represents a significant improvement, adding awareness that something, at least, is wrong. This is all too often the level of the beginning speech student. Aware that outcomes do not meet their intentions, conscious incompetents attempt new behaviors mechanically, hoping somehow to strike it lucky but without any conscious analysis. When a behavior is identified that "reliably produces negative results," that behavior is abandoned in favor of the next possibility that comes to mind.

Level III, conscious competence, reflects the posture toward which most of our teaching is directed. To the awareness that

something is wrong, we add analytical understanding. Conscious competents learn to attend the reactions of their auditor(s), use this feedback to match problems with their own knowledge of communication process, and then alter their own behavior to remedy malfunctions.

It is here, in level III analysis, that our present effort begins its work. Analytical understanding is a conscious process and, whether we accomplish the process with the written aide-de-memoire, as in much public speaking, or with the collaboration of appropriate others, as in interpersonal relations, the resulting interchange becomes unsatisfying for all parties when simultaneous conscious and analytical monitoring gets in the way of interactivity. In fact, the simple conscious intrusion of any information about the ongoing process, to say nothing of the deliberate analysis such intrusion may spark, inevitably interrupts the process itself. In interpersonal communication, the results are clumsy; in public speaking they can be disasterous.

Howell states the problem thusly:

> When people are consciously monitoring their own or another's communication, they are making strategic decisions thoughtfully, which means that they are both listening and analyzing what is going on. While they are examining what was just said and planning the next statement, they get behind in the flow of events.[3]

In addition to interrupting the flow, such "internal monologue" readily becomes the hidden agendas and private goal assessments that foster perceptions of manipulative and insincere behavior by sender and receiver alike. Here then is the heart of

the dilemma posed at the outset of this essay: we teach precepts as though they can be consciously applied yet hold up an interactive ideal in which conscious application is not possible.

Still another perspective from which to view the limitations of conscious analysis, mentioned by Howell, is that even at its most thoughtful, the level III process is always concerned with breaking the interaction down into parts so that areas requiring corrective measures can be identified. This amounts to treating communication as a closed system which, after all, it is not. Because one can never identify all the elements involved in an interaction, conscious competence is limited by its inability to examine the whole transaction.

Level IV, unconscious competence, suggests a productive exit from the precept-performance paradox of consciousness in interaction. At level IV, communicators are cabaple of conscious analysis but have also learned to trust their unconscious mental processes to do whatever needs to be done during interaction. Thus the level IV communicator focuses all his/her attention and energy on being aware of the existential situation as it unfolds, confident that s/he will do the optimal behavior, the best that s/he is capable of given the fullest possible awareness of the moment. "In other words," Howell states, "the unconsciously competent person has learned to rely on out-of-awareness data processing."[4] Conscious analysis and planning are vital steps in preparing to communicate but, during interaction, one is totally focused on the event.

A fifth level, unconscious supercompetence, is identified with the notion of peak experience. "Unconscious competence becomes supercompetence when the performer becomes exhilerated and the performing becomes effortless. . . . The total resources of the human being achieve harmonious integration." Here are those moments when the speaker feels his energy in the spellbound audience or the new lovers first discover that their feelings are mutual and completely lose track of time.

Howell's five levels of communication competence illuminate the pedagogical concerns voiced at the outset. Where our traditional approach to the basic course has been with movement from level II to level III, that is, helping students to grasp the basic knowledge necessary for deliberate analytical improvement of their communication, the model that we increasingly recognize as the ideal is not level III but level IV.

Orientation-Incubation-Composition: Preparing to Communicate

The difficulty with teaching unconscious competence is at once obvious. By definition, that which is out of consciousness is out of conscious control and thus, at first blush, beyond the reach of conventional teaching. But the good news is that what needs to be taught isn't concrete procedure or principle anyway. The out-of-awareness information-processing apparatus in each of us already knows what to do and does it quite well, as a moment's reflection can clearly demonstrate. After all, no conscious mechanism can be observed to sort or to store perceptions, to recall or to compose messages or, for that matter, to explain any of the workings we are so

readily aware of when we contemplate the whole business of mentation. The process simply happens. All attempts to grasp it are metaphoric though some are surely more powerful than others.[5]

Students generally need to have these things pointed out to them. The Western culture mentality usually needs a great deal of reassurance before it can accept the notion that our reasoning faculties operate just as well if not better outside our awareness than they do with conscious guidance. The most concrete assurance comes to us in the conventional literature of creative problem solving.[6] A brainstorming exercise, for example, brings students to produce ideas "out of nowhere." This nowhere, one can point out, is the same nowhere from which speech is composed, from which feelings emerge, and so on. To those who protest that their intuitive decisions are sometimes wrong, the instructor may respond that their consciously reasoned decisions are sometimes wrong as well. Indeed, conscious deliberation may well be more vulnerable to defense mechanisms like projection and avoidance, resulting in poorer decisions by ignoring relevant information.

Students should be led and encouraged to accept the proposition that, left to its own devices, the out-of-awareness processing apparatus will do the best that it can with the information it has available, to include, of course, an understanding of correct reasoning. This notion then sets the stage for acceptance of a general three-step procedure students can adapt to the demands of any anticipated communication event, from dyadic encounter to public speech. In this procedure, a thorough application of level III conscious competence is combined with systematic facilitation of

creativity in preparation, giving the mind the best possible information to work with, so that during the event one's awareness can be totally focused on the other participant(s), thus enabling communication behavior at level IV.

The similarity between Orientation-Incubation-Composition and various systems of creative problem solving is patent. After a thorough study of the various dimensions of the anticipated communication event (orientation), the communicator must allow time for out-of-awareness processing to occur (incubation). The third stage, composition, has an obvious resemblance to the generation of potential problem solutions in brainstorming. Along with resolution of the precept-performance paradox, it is worthwhile to note several other speech classroom problems that this three-step system resolves.

First, the sophomoric tactic of pamphlet speaking, that is, using someone else's pre-determined (and usually published) arguments to present a coherent but plagiarized and monolithic case is precluded. Students will readily find that, without proper orientation to all sides of an issue, composition cannot occur. Without access to adequate information, the mind cannot make effective choices and is not free to interact, at best producing a wooden, stilted delivery, quite likely plagued by embarassing lapses into forgetfulness. However, the O-I-C system deters the possibility of such an abbreviated preparation ever reaching the lecturn. A word to the wise is usually sufficient.

Inadequate incubation generally yields similar difficulties, thus working to minimize last minute efforts. In both cases, once students understand the levels of competence and accept O-I-C as the bridge to level IV, the perils of attempting to short-cut the system

are underscored. Besides, learning of powers they were not previously aware they possessed usually generates enthusiasm to follow the system fully and try those powers out.

Finally, the issue of written preparation and its potential for interference with interactive oral process is resolved thusly: while note-taking can be highly useful if not essential in the orientation stage, any form of written documentation should be discouraged once incubation begins. Although it is highly appropriate to read statistics and quotes from notecards during a public speaking event, any other written material becomes a blinder that limits interaction. Whether notes and outlines are brought to the lecturn or left behind, written preparation draws the mind away from interaction and toward attempts to recall and reproduce. Again, once students understand the importance of total interaction, performance difficulties are minimized. The differences between an interactive presentation and one tied to previously locked-in material are so readily obvious that no one lingers in doubt beyond the first round of speechmaking. The same "oral composer" that works so freely in ordinary conversation is loosed to do its magic on the speech audience.

In practice, the speech teacher who wants to integrate this approach into the basic course will probably find few practical changes are required. The traditional subject matter, communication and rhetorical theory, research methods, and the like, usually introduced gradually through a series of speech projects, may remain unchanged. What does change is the preparation process: traditional material is now viewed as the stuff of the orientation step in preparing to communicate while incubation and oral composition replace

written tactics regardless of whether the overall emphasis is on public speaking, on small group and interpersonal, or on any combination thereof.

The orientation step can be further divided into subject, audience, self, and process dynamics, with emphasis varied according to the nature of the anticipated event. For most of us, subject orientation is likely to be paramount in the public speaking emphasis. Here is the place to review use of sources, to stress the importance of knowing issues from all sides, to teach invention and topoi, and the nature of socially constructed reality. In subject orientation also are opportunities to deal with identification and the notion of perception as meaning, either of which serves as a transition into the second kind of orientation, orientation to audience. When the focus is on interpersonal or small group, the importance of being well-informed as a dimension of credibility and of group responsibility can be stressed. If the anticipated interaction will have the relationship itself as subject, this is an opportunity to deal with types of relationships and the communication characteristics of each.

Orientation to audience is a place to further explore the issues of strategic analysis and to ensure comprehension of the notion that messages are created for audiences. More important, however, audience orientation is an appropriate place to develop the wholistic attitude that underlies interactive communication, that the mind will create the most appropriate messages it can out-of-awareness, limited only by access to information about the on-going process. Advance

knowledge about the audience's belief systems, their relationship to the subject, and so on informs strategy as well as composition, of course, but must not be allowed to substitute for existential awareness during interaction. To underscore the wholistic nature of the process, I suggest that students practice imagining the audience in front of them and judge the thoroughness of their orientation by the concreteness of the images they conjure. When the imagined audience begins responding to them, this kind of orientation is adequate.

That students are differentially able to imagine at all generates a discussional transition to the third kind of orientation, orientation to self. Matters of personal style come here and the issues and techniques of self-awareness. Having students review videotapes of their own speeches is most useful in this regard. An interactive approach, of course, belies the possibility of any claim to universality in speech dynamics, requiring frank admission that each speaking situation is different, every speaker's abilities different, and that indeed communication is the study of bridging individual differences.

The fourth kind of orientation, to process dynamics, contains the rest of the traditional curriculum. What is likely to work and why, what can go wrong and why, what are the options and why. Here is the catch-all heading under which the teacher's own preferred theoretical approaches are nurtured. While focus on subject, on audience, and on self-orientation can be somewhat compartmentalized into units, orientation to the dynamics of communication process remains the major classroom activity throughout any course. Not only

through the traditional and analytical teaching methods of lectures, discussions, and readings, but at least equally through the process of experiencing, the synthetic right-brained kind of learning, through listening to others' speeches and experiencing others' attempts to change relationships, does the student become a better communicator. Indeed, understanding orientation as a double process of right and left brain learning, that is, as a wholistic activity, and drawing an analogy to the classical dichotomy of precepts and models, provides still more reinforcement for the students' acceptance of O-I-C and the ideals of levels IV and V.

Incubation, "sitting ot it," implicitly contains the notion that relationships, that mutual understanding, and that persuasion all take time. It is precisely because time for conscious processing during interaction is not viable that advance preparation is essential. Discussing incubation as a vital force in any creative endeavor underlines the role of out-of-awareness processing and facilitates the introduction of other time factors: the proper timing of messages for optimal reception, the relativity of time during interaction so graphically illustrated by experiencing the differences between good and poor speeches, and, lastly but quite encouraging, the minimal time demands of the composition stage, provided orientation and incubation have been properly accomplished. "Do your orientation right away," I tell my students, " and the other two stages will take care of themselves." Out-of-awareness processing, far from being instantaneous, requires at least a few days between orientation and composition during which students need do nothing at all.

Composition--oral, not written--becomes the easiest step of

all once students have confidence in their own out-of-awareness processes. No special time need be set aside. Students will find that oral composition surfaces all by itself whenever consciousness is not otherwise deliberately occupied. They simply imagine themselves to be in front of the audience or in conversation or meeting with the other person and, to themselves, say what needs to be said. They repeat the process over and over. Each time the words and ideas will change. Each time new ideas will arise. Each time, out of awareness, the mind is editing, adapting, changing, and experimenting as it weaves its way back and forth through orientation in the light of this new and private imagined experience. This can be done in the shower, driving to school or office, whenever a few minutes are not otherwise filled. After ten or twenty rehearsals (this is free time, after all), speakers find themselves filled with confidence that they can handle whatever arises and are then free to interact.

When the time comes for the actual event, instead of being concerned about recall, students recognize that, out of awareness, their minds will use whatever observations they can provide regarding the interaction in progress to create the best possible speech behavior for that particular situation. Knowing that once an interaction begins the best possible focus for their attention is fully on the audience, classroom speeches, meetings, and exercises become laboratories for students' newfound unconscious competence.

As a final note, it is worthwhile to consider the roots from which the precept performance paradox arose. Current interest in the subject of literacy and the sorts of distinctions made by Ong,

McLuhan, and others regarding oral, written, and electronic media cultures provide many clues. Although there can be little doubt that writing has left its indelible imprint on the twentieth century Western consciousness, it is equally clear that the written word, whether as bridge or as barricade, represents a tertium quid among oral communicators. If communication is to have as its end shared meaning and its means overlaps in fields of experience and feeling, then the uses of writing--and who would deny that they abound?--should perhaps not be extended quite as far into their oral antecedents as current classroom practices often take for granted. Writing is certainly the stock-in-trade of scholarship, but so is speech the stock-in-trade of human relationship.

OIC is a procedure rooted deeply in orality, based on the assumption that writing is a later process, not just developmentally, but cognitively as well.[7] The speech-communication instructor who adopts this procedure in the classroom will find the assumption justified by everyday pedagogical experience.

NOTES

1. (Belmont, Ca:Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1982).

2. This material is presented in Chapter 2, esp. pp. 29-32.

3. P.31.

4. Howell prefers an electronic data processing metaphor to describe what is usually intended by the term "intrapersonal communication." See pp. 45-46.

5. Howell seems to prefer Zen metaphor like that of W. Timothy Gallwey, The Inner Game of Tennis, (New York; Random House, 1974).

6. This literature represents the major thrust toward a nonmetaphoric examination of out-of-awareness processes to date: for instance, George Prince, The Practice of Creativity (New York: Colliers, 1972); James Adams, Conceptual Blockbusting (Stanford, Ca: Freeman, 1974); Arthur Koestler, The Act of Creation (New York; MacMillan, 1964).

7. This assumption seems born out by Vogotsky et al. See John R. Johnson. "The Role of Inner Speech in Human Communication." Communication Education, 33:3 (July, 1984), pp. 211-222. Also see pieces by Stress and McFarland in the same issue.

O-I-C: An Orality-Based Procedure for Teaching Interactive Communication in the Basic Course

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the pedagogical problems that result from teaching communication theories and precepts as though they can be consciously applied during performance while simultaneously holding up a communication ideal of total interaction that prohibits conscious activity beyond the messages of the interaction. Certain uses of writing in preparation are at once causative and symptomatic. Building on the theoretical work of William S. Howell, the present paper explains a three step procedure, Orientation-Incubation-Composition, that facilitates thorough creative preparation in anticipation of any communication event and frees the user's total resources to focus on the existential interchange as it occurs.

Although the stress is placed on a public speaking emphasis, the O-I-C procedure is shown to be applicable in dyadic and small group communication as well.